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ISLAMIC RADICALS AND TERROR AGAINST THE WEST

BY

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ABSTRACT

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The ultimate source of Islamic radical motivated terrorism and its related violence lies at the extreme radical religious level of Islam. Therefore, to understand Islamic radical terrorism and its related violence and hatred toward the West, it is first necessary to present a brief history of Islam. With that foundation laid, a definition of religious terrorism will be discussed followed by an examination of the Islamic view of the world. Next, Western views and perceptions of Islam specifically targeting Islamic radicals will be explained, since many in the West look at Islamic radicals with apprehension and fear. Finally, two crucial questions pertaining to the current situation between the West and the radicals will be explored: Why do Islamic radicals hate the West, and what can be done to ease tensions between the two?

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ISLAMIC RADICALS AND TERROR AGAINST THE WEST.....	i
ABSTRACT	iii
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	2
RELIGIOUS TERRORISM DEFINED	5
THE ISLAMIC WORLD VIEW	6
THE WESTERN VIEW OF MUSLIMS.....	7
WHY DO MUSLIMS HATE THE WEST	9
WHAT CAN BE DONE	12
CONCLUSION.....	14
ENDNOTES	17
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	23

ISLAMIC RADICALS AND TERROR AGAINST THE WEST

We in the West have always been uncomfortable with Islam. We have tolerance for, even interest in, Buddhism and Oriental religions, but Islam—a faith followed by one sixth of the world's population—seems rooted in fanaticism and vaguely threatening. Many Westerners think of Christianity as standing for things and of Islam as standing against things.¹

INTRODUCTION

Although the fall of the Berlin Wall and the abrupt end of the Cold War proceeded a new world order and ushered in a new era, it has also generated new global perils to peace, stability, and democracy. The collapse of bi-polar supremacy has forced the West to map out a course of international relations that includes Islamic nations that have as well drawn up their own plans for a new world order. As with all global changes, the disintegration of the old order has created a new environment, with its own set of norms and rules.

When commercial airplanes crashed into the World Trade Center and plowed into the Pentagon on 11 September 2001, not only were lives lost and property destroyed, this atrocity shattered the confidence with which many Westerners view the world. The images projected from the scene induced horrified viewers to experience the devastation of those who experienced it firsthand. As the two towers disintegrated and the Pentagon burned out of control, most viewers underwent a corresponding loss of innocence and security.

What would motivate a person to self destructively crash an airplane into a building with thousands of people inside? The quick answer was that religiously motivated radicals were responsible. Indeed religiously motivated terrorism looms as an increasing threat. The September 11 incident and a host of violent episodes targeting the Western world over the past ten years has brought religious terrorism to the forefront, casting Westerners into an uneasy position already occupied by many in the non-Western and Third World. Religious terrorism is becoming more violent, calculated to be terrifying and increasingly motivated by hatred for the West. Terrorists are also increasingly using religion as a shield to justify the goals that Islamic radicals are striving to achieve. However, assuming religious imperatives as the sole motivation for radical terrorist operations is too simplistic. Similarly, describing the radicals as crazy or cowardly does not fully appreciate the character of their twisted logic. They certainly subscribe to a way of thinking that the West neither approves nor fully understands. Yet they act on their worldview with incredible commitment. Some observers contend that recent religious terrorism has been fostered by the resurgence of traditional Islamic values.

This study investigates Islamic radicals first by presenting a brief history of Islam. One of the basic factors that contribute to their terrorist activities is their understanding of Islamic history. From the historical background of Islamic history, the study proceeds to a definition of Islamic radical terrorism followed by an analysis of the current Islamic worldview. Next, Western views and perceptions of Islam, specifically regarding Islamic radicals, will be analyzed, especially Western apprehensions of Islamic culture. Finally, two crucial questions pertaining to current relations between the radicals and the West will be explored: Why do Islamic radicals hate the West? And what can be done to ease these tensions?

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Historically, Western civilization has been associated with European civilization. "The West" emerged about A.D. 700 or 800, not long after Islam emerged. The West, as used in this study, includes Europe, North America and other European settler countries as Australia and New Zealand. The term "the West" also refers to what used to be called Western Christendom, thus being the only civilization identified by a compass direction and not by the name of a particular people, religion, or geographical area.²

Terrorism has been with us for centuries. But it has recently attracted widespread attention because of its dramatic character and its sudden and violent impact on the West. The term "revolution" or "revolutionary" has a modern ring to it. Yet it does not seem out of place when applied to Mohammed's achievement in seventh century Arabia. The history of Islam is brought with movements that sought simultaneously to impose what radicals saw as the true doctrine of Islam and to overthrow the existing political order.³ Islamic radical activities are shaped by a deep reverence for history, which they separate into two phases. The first phase is a positive time, one of growth and expansion that brought Muslim culture and civilization to its height. The second phase is one of decline, during which Muslims experienced military defeat, loss of territory, corruption, and the intrusion of Western colonization. They believe abandonment of faith and piety also attributed to this decline. Thus radicals believe only a revitalization of fundamental Islamic ways can restore the fortunes of the Muslim people.⁴

Islam emerged as a religious movement in the city of Mecca, Arabia at the early part of the seventh century. It was preached by Mohammed (570-632 A.D.), the prophet of Islam whom Muslims believe received a series of revelations from God through the Angel Gabriel.⁵ Rivalry immediately arose between the Muslims and the non-Muslims. Friction developed between Mohammed and the Jews of Medina in the 620's, when the Jews refused to accept Mohammed's status as a prophet. Beginning with their uniformly negative view of Islam, the

Eastern and Western Christian churches of the time also contributed to the confrontation with Ideological castigation that intensified military confrontation. Both the conflicts of theology and of arms set the tone for the subsequent centuries of rivalry.⁶

The Islamic invasion of North Africa, Western Asia, and parts of Europe in the seventh & eighth centuries not only divested Christian nations of the holy city of Jerusalem but also of some of their most cherished provinces. Rising Muslim sea power and commercial prowess in the Mediterranean isolated Western Europe from the rest of the civilized world.⁷ However, Islamic expansion was halted in the ninth and tenth centuries. As Muslim expansion slowed, and the Islamic empire began to splinter, Muslim leaders had no choice but to turn their attention inward and begin building inter-state relations. They subsequently, emplaced rules to govern relations between Muslim states and between Muslim and non-Muslim states. During this long struggle with the West, some Muslims allied with Christians to fight other Muslims when they needed help.⁸

The assassins of Islam emerged in the 11th century and are the first known example of an organized international conspiracy.⁹ The word “assassin” is derived from Arabic; literally translated it means “hashish-eater”. Non-Muslims applied it to a sectarian group of Muslim radicals who were used by their spiritual leaders to spread terror among Christians and other religious enemies.¹⁰ At the end of the 11th century, Europeans launched the Crusades to retake the Holy Land. The advent of the Crusaders provoked a strong religious response on the Muslim side. Defense of Islam and Muslim lands became a sacred duty. Christians were eventually driven out of the Holy Land, prompting another Muslim expansion.¹¹

In the 15th century, the Ottoman Empire captured Constantinople (1453). This began another period of Muslim dominance in the Mediterranean region. Muslim influence, both economic and geopolitical, left an imposing legacy of the terrible Muslim Turks and ongoing Muslim opposition to Western interests.¹² By the 16th century, strong European national states began to break the Muslim commercial monopoly of most African and Asian trade. Along with the discovery of vast resources in the New World, the effects of the Renaissance and Reformation and the Industrial Revolution enabled European powers to outstrip the Muslim world commercially, economically, and militarily.¹³

During the 17th century, the pendulum continued to swing in favor of the Christian world. Eventually superior Western military organization and weapons prevailed. A long period of European domination began, and the Russian Czar encroached further on Muslim principalities by bringing millions of Muslims under Russian rule.¹⁴ Since the end of the 17th century, the Muslim world has been in decline. Islam became a cocoon, and the Middle East slipped into a

state of lethargy, relatively dormant until shaken by two monumental events in the 20th century: the creation of Israel and the discovery of oil.¹⁵ These events prompted the Muslim world to begin their search for reasons why this lethargy exists. Islamic radicals have determined that it is because Muslims have abandoned or forgotten the divine aspect of their history that they suffered through long centuries of lethargy. They believe Muslims must return to the “straight path” outlined by Allah in the Quran, elaborated in the Shariah law, and historically modeled by the life of the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁶

By the end of the 19th Century, Muslims were no longer a threat to Europe. The crumbling of the Ottoman Empire following World War I made large portions of Ottoman territory, French and British mandates. Ataturk officially abolished the Ottoman Empire in 1922, but it was not until the end of World War II that an exhausted West relinquished control and some Muslims, with the exception of the Palestinians, gained independence. Even though Muslim radicals saw themselves as beginning to emerge from a long period of Western domination, bitter resentment has remained deeply entrenched.¹⁷ During the era of Western colonization groups of highly educated Muslim thinkers sought to show the West that Islam was not what they thought it was—that is, a religion of violence and one, which makes converts by means of the sword. They tried to present Islam positively, not without apologetics. In their own way, they even tried to bridge Western civilization with Islamic culture. However, following the development and eventual independence of many Muslim countries, such intellectual elites started to decrease in numbers and influence. What took their place was a relatively younger group of thinkers who did not feel the need to apologize for Islam.¹⁸

During the past several decades, acts of violence carried out by small groups of radical Muslims and targeted against Westerners have increased, attracting much negative and distorted attention in the Western media.¹⁹ Religious radicals strive to ultimately legitimize violence and free their lands of Western influence. Their historic role has been to act out their fanatical zeal, fomented by an all-consuming hatred for the West, built on a religious foundation.²⁰ A most striking development in recent years has been the use of theological concepts to justify terrorist activity, a phenomenon called ‘holy terror’.²¹ Yet as far as the essentials of religion and virtue pertain, there is no inherent hostility, or need there be, between the Muslims and the West. Even so, historical conflicts have erupted from the hatred and antagonism of organized radicals of such religions.²²

RELIGIOUS TERRORISM DEFINED

As the new century unfolds, the West faces an unprecedented and increasingly dangerous threat from Islamic radicals. The threat of Islamic radical violence is not a new phenomenon. Religion and terrorism share a long history. Nevertheless, the evolutionary nature of religious terrorism and its recent alterations and adaptation have made it the greatest current threat to Western security. If indeed Islamic radicals potentially pose the most dangerous threat to the West, it is important that Western governments clearly understand, precisely what religious terrorism is. The first problem that faces Western nations is agreement upon a shared definition. What we now have is many a trite and hackneyed phrase, namely that one man's terrorist is another man's patriot. For example, the current conflict between India and Pakistan regarding military activities in Kashmir: India calls it terrorism and Pakistan calls it freedom fighting. The concept has thereby often been subjected to a double standard based on the power of definition, which leads only to an in-group, out-group discussion.²³ The term is also carelessly used as a synonym for rebellion, street battles, civil strife, insurrection, and rural guerrilla warfare. The indiscriminate use of the term not only inflates the statistics of terrorist activities but also makes understanding the specific character of religious terrorism and the means to cope with it more difficult.²⁴ While terror directed at civilian targets is widely condemned in the West as senseless and unjustifiable, the same acts are often viewed in many Muslim countries as noble acts of "freedom fighters."

The modern radical terrorist sees himself as being engaged in a just religious war in which right and justice are exclusively on his side; hence, he is absolved from the customary restraints on the use of violence.²⁵ Certain radicals promote an uncompromising interpretation of the faith, which divides the world into Muslim and infidel, and enjoins the former to wage unremitting warfare against the latter. The main focus of this warfare has been the Western world.²⁶ Most people feel that religion should provide tranquility and peace. Yet for many radicals, religion has supplied not only the ideology but also the motivation and the organizational structure for their terrorist actions.²⁷

Western views of terrorism are usually framed in terms of what would be the proper response to terrorist actions. The West rarely entertains the idea that terrorism itself might be morally justified. However, whether this presumption is justified or not depends on what one understands terrorism to be.²⁸ Many definitions do not distinguish between common crimes and acts normally regarded as within the realm of international terrorism. For example, Section 202 of HR 1179, "A Bill to Amend the Internal Security Act of 1950 to Control and Penalize Terrorists", defines crimes of terrorism as:

Espionage, sabotage, kidnapping, extortion, skyjacking, robbery, bombing, holding a person prisoner or hostage or any threat to do any injury to a human, animal or personal or real property or any conspiracy to do any of the above in order to compel an act or omission by any person, or any governmental entity.²⁹

To lend focus to this study, Islamic radical terrorism is defined as: Planning, preparation for, or participation in violent activities by Islamic radical movements designed to create an atmosphere of despair meant to terrify the West and shake the faith of its citizens in their governments. Such radical terrorists are convinced that the death and suffering of innocent people, who are otherwise disassociated with the terrorists, will cause the West to vacate its presence in the Saudi Peninsula and cease support for Israel. These radicals believe their actions are justified by the religious cause they espouse and the will of Allah.³⁰

THE ISLAMIC WORLD VIEW

In order to understand the sources and inspiration of the contemporary Islamic resurgence, some appreciation of the relationship of religion to society in Islam is essential. In both Muslim belief and Muslim history, Islam has occupied an important place in the ideology of the state and in the conduct of Muslim politics. For Muslims, Allah (God) is the central fact of reality. He is the same God who revealed himself to all the Prophets and finally, and most completely, to the Prophet Mohammed. This revelation to Mohammed is described in the Quran, the actual living word of Allah. A Muslim's duty is obedience and submission (Islam) to the will of Allah. However, the submission incumbent upon the Muslim is not that of mere passivity or acceptance of a set of rituals, rather it is submission to the divine command, to strive (jihad) to actively realize Allah's will in history.³¹ Thus, the Quran declares that man is Allah's representative (khilafah) on earth,³² and Allah has given creation to man to operate as a divine trust (amanah).³³ It is based on how man carries out his role as Allah's representative that he is either rewarded or punished.³⁴

The Muslim's obligation to realize Allah's will in history is communal as well as individual.³⁵ In the Islamic community (ummah), religious solidarity replaced tribal ties and the ummah serves as the dynamic vehicle for realization of the divine mandate in society, as an example to other people of the world.³⁶ Thus, Islam, like Christianity, is a world religion with a universal mission. However, it is distinguished from Christianity by the unity and totality of the Islamic view of reality. As Allah is one (tawhid), so all of his creation has an underlying unity and is subject to His rule. Therefore, religion is not separate but rather integral to every aspect of life: prayer, fasting, politics, law, and society. This belief is reflected in the doctrine of tawhid, in the development of the Islamic state and Islamic law (the shariah), and in the mind of the radical.³⁷

The Islamic state is a community of believers. Allah is the ultimate sovereign of the state and, indeed, of all creation. Political and religious leadership was vested in Mohammed, Allah's messenger on earth, who served as both Prophet and political leader of the Islamic community. Upon Mohammed's death, both his successor (caliph) and Islam's leaders (Imam's) are obligated to ensure the faithful following of Allah's will as embodied in Islamic law. Law is rooted in divine revelation, the Quran and Sunna (example of the Prophet). It provides the blueprint for Muslim society—a comprehensive code of life that includes laws that regulate prayer and alms-giving as well as family, criminal, commercial, and international law. Religious scholars (ulama) serve as the guardians of the tradition and, therefore, they are often advisors to governments (caliphate). They also run the schools and universities; develop, apply, and interpret the law; and administer the social welfare system.³⁸

Thus, to be a Muslim is to live in an Islamic state, governed by Islamic law, pursuing a divinely mandated mission. Success and power are signs of both divine guidance and the community's fidelity. For Muslims, history is indeed inherently meaningful and omni present. The traditional Islamic worldview provides a holistic approach toward life, a life in which religion is intimately and organically related to politics, law, and society.

THE WESTERN VIEW OF MUSLIMS

Islam is not a mere religion—it is a way of life, a model of society, a culture, and a civilization. If you reduce it to an institution, you are both belittling it and condemning yourself to misunderstand it: Islam is not confined to a 'church' whose relations with the state can be codified or concordat. Islam is the state if those in charge of the state were true Muslims.³⁹

Islam is one of the most rapidly growing religions in the world, and Islamic radicals are one of its more forceful manifestations. The activities and pronouncements of the radicals often appear in Western newspapers, news magazines, and television reports. Yet the phenomenon continues to be little understood.⁴⁰ Western perceptions of Islam and the concerns that arise from them are rooted in a tunneled perspective of a long period of Judeo-Christian and Islam interaction. From the time of the Prophet Mohammed, the religions of these two civilizations have been in conflict.⁴¹

There is little doubt that the West's perception of Islam has tended to be characterized by ignorance, confusion, and misinformation. Until the events of September 11, the West's awareness of the Islam lacked insight into its basic tenets, recent history, internal schisms, and regions of dominance. Although educated about the Crusades, most people in the West knew little of the Five Pillars, the expansion of Islam to Southeast Asia and Africa, differences among

Islamic sects, and the incontrovertible fact that the majority of Muslims live outside the Arab world.⁴² Some observers in the West associate the peoples and cultures of the Middle East, and in particular Islamic radicals, with violence and terrorism. There is a consistent tendency to portray the peoples of the region as primitive and aggressive.⁴³ As a result of negative stereotypes of Islam, some Westerns have adopted a theory of conspiratorial violence, the belief that there exists a global Islamic radical terrorist infrastructure that is responsible for disparate acts of violence towards the West.⁴⁴ “The prevailing Western perception of the Arab was captured in a political cartoon in a Boston newspaper. It showed a robed and bearded figure kneeling in prayer, and over his head, in heavy black letters was a single word: HATE!”⁴⁵ To a large extend the Muslims are misjudged in the West for the simple reason that they are different. Their language, dress, prayers, behavior, and thoughts don’t fit into any pattern easily grasped by Westerns.⁴⁶ Jack Shaheen, a noted scholar of Muslim images, has concluded the media “tends to perpetuate four basic myths about Arabs: they are all fabulously wealthy; they are barbaric and uncultured; they are sex maniacs with a penchant for white slavery; and they revel in acts of terrorism.”⁴⁷

Many in the West are thus held hostage by their ignorance. Mention Islamic radicals, and they envision mobs swirling around a burning flag in a remote corner of the globe chanting, “Allah is great” and “Death to the West!” Or they see bearded crazies in the streets of a Middle East city, holding a Quran in one hand and a rifle in the other.⁴⁸ In fact, these radicals represent only an extremely small portion of the Arab world. But their violent actions color the West’s view of all of Islam and cast it in a most unfavorable light.⁴⁹ The West singles them out primarily because, unlike most other people of the developing world, they have resisted assimilating Western ways or capitulating to Western values.⁵⁰

The existence of, and roles played by, international Islamic institutions are rarely recognized in the West.⁵¹ Unfortunately for years the West has had policy-makers who themselves are befuddled by Islamic ways. They understand little about the people and almost nothing about Islam, and their ignorance has put the West on a collision course with Islamic culture. It is as though the radicals were born instead of made. Thus, it becomes convenient to ignore Islamic grievances rooted in a century, as the radicals believe, of being deceived and humiliated by Western powers. They view Islam as a threat to the West without asking why non-Arab Muslims, such as those in Nigeria, do not burn Western embassies.⁵² Even Mohammed has taken his share of knocks from the West. In a 1939 essay, John Gunther compared Mohammed with Mussolini and Hitler:

The temptation to include Mohammed in a gallery of living portraits is almost irresistible. His career of conversion, invitation, and terrific conquest is extraordinarily contemporary. Half a dozen times in discussing his life and career, one comes across modern analogies. For instance, the...flight from Mecca to Medina is startling like the march on Rome. Like Mussolini, Mohammed prepared the way well in advance, and did not travel himself until his underlings had arranged and guaranteed a good reception. He was—as Hitler is—a mystic, anti-Semitic, and an expansionist.⁵³

The very notion of Muslims being Western haters and evil is stultifying and superficial. It obscures the diversity and even the humanity of the non-Western people. This attitude makes Islam seem mysterious, inscrutable, irrational and, in the last resort, a target for Western hostility.⁵⁴ In spite of its glorious past, Islam remains generally unknown if not misunderstood in the predominately Christian West.⁵⁵

WHY DO MUSLIMS HATE THE WEST

The Muslim world is far from unanimous in its rejection of the West. There are still significant numbers of Muslims with whom the West shares certain basic cultural, moral, social, and political beliefs and aspirations; there is still an imposing Western presence in some Muslim lands, some of which are Western allies.⁵⁶ For some time, though, there has been a rising tide of rebellion by Islamic radicals against the West and a desire to reassert Muslim values and restore Muslim greatness.⁵⁷ It is quite likely that if the Arab world had not stagnated over the last two centuries, but made more progress in wealth and power, there would be less resentment and a lesser sense of inferiority vis-à-vis America and the West. Lack of progress, combined with the breakdown of ideologies has generated something akin to a holy rage against the West.⁵⁸

The failure of both the West and Islamic moderates to reduce the problems of the Muslim world has opened the door to Islamic radicals. Throughout the period of Western imperial intrusion, the radicals watched as non-Muslim and moderate influences eroded their religion, culture, values, and polity.⁵⁹ The radicals also watched as the Muslim world suffered successive stages of defeat. First was the loss of domination in the world to the advancing power of the West. Second was the undermining of Muslim authority in their own countries through an invasion of foreign ideals and ways of life, sometimes through the influence of foreign rulers or settlers. Third, and the last straw, was the challenge to Islamic mastery in their own houses from emancipated women and rebellious children. All this was too much to endure. The outbreak of rage toward the West seemed inevitable. It was only natural that this rage should eventually draw its strength from ancient beliefs and loyalties.⁶⁰

Clashes between cultures are hardly a new phenomenon. Yet few have found it more unsettling than the radicals have. For them, far more than most, the future is rooted in the past, in their own unique and rich heritage, and in their belief that what Mohammed the Prophet taught 13 centuries ago is a precise guide for today's life. When their sons would rather watch "Dallas" than go to the mosque, when Nike sneakers and a greed for material things replaced prayer beads and the need for spiritual fulfillment, then the very foundation of their faith was literally challenged and shaken.⁶¹

In the classic Islamic view, to which radicals are calling all Muslims to return, the world and all humanity are divided into two: the House of Islam, where the Muslim law and faith prevail; and the rest of the world, known as the House of Unbelief, which it is the duty of Muslims ultimately to bring to Islam. Nevertheless, the greater part of the world is still outside Islam. Moreover, even inside the Islamic lands, according to the Islamic radicals, the faith of Islam has been undermined and the West has abrogated the law of Islam. The obligation of holy war therefore begins at home and continues abroad, against the same infidel enemy.⁶² The Islamic world has been struggling to free itself from Western political and economic domination, to redefine its own identity, and to formulate its own response to Western ideas.⁶³ The West still penetrates the Middle East. The West does so commercially, culturally, and psychologically. Radical terrorism is a response to many of these factors. It is a response against Western penetration, and what the West's penetration represents.⁶⁴

Western technology cannot be isolated. With it came Western culture and financial values. Indeed the accumulation of wealth can become a religion apparently as powerful as Islam. The radicals saw their world changing. They responded as so many others have in times of crisis: they turned to religion.⁶⁵ More often than not, as long as the primary objective was a movement against Western domination, the call against the West was understood as a call to restore the traditional Islamic order.⁶⁶

But why have the radicals become so active, with such open hostility against the West, at this juncture in history? Why is the West the enemy? This question is hard for observers to answer and harder still for Westerners to fathom. As far as the radicals are concerned, several motives appear to stir the rage within them towards the West. First, consider stationing of Western troops in the Islamic heartland, Saudi Arabia, the guardian of the holy sites of Mecca and Medina accessible to Muslims only. This has only served to exacerbate the already highly charged sentiments among many radicals.⁶⁷ In an interview with the Los Angles Times in 1998, Osama bin Laden cited a list of crimes, which included occupation of Saudi Arabia, as a reason to hate the West.

"For over 10 years the West has occupied the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors, and turning its bases into a spearhead through which to fight neighboring Muslim peoples."⁶⁸

A second reason the West is regarded as an enemy of Islam is its support for Israel. Many radicals draw their image of the West not only from the Crusades, but also from the more recent period of Western colonial occupation. Most radicals associate the formation of the state of Israel with more recent Western imperialism.⁶⁹ The radicals hated Israel from its inception because it is an organic part of the West. Israel represents precisely the incarnation of those very Western traditions and values with which the radicals hate and likewise fear.⁷⁰ The radicals see the West's support of Israel as an obvious ploy to serve the Jew's petty state and divert attention from its occupation of Jerusalem and murder of Muslims there.⁷¹

Islam is not opposed to Judaism. Rather, Islam is opposed to Zionism, to Zionist politics and conduct. Theodor Herzl launched Zionism. It was designed to transform Palestine and its adjacent territories into a Jewish state. Its single-minded purpose gives absolute priority to Jewish statehood over all considerations, including morality. Zionism exercises its power to the fullest to acquire land. Whether applying pressure, blackmail, bribery, or speculation, Zionism continues to force eviction of Palestinian farmers from land their families have owned for millennia.⁷² It is for these exercises that the militants condemn Zionism. Moreover, since the West is the major supporter and financial benefactor to Israel, and particularly the United States, the West is included in that condemnation.

A third reason for the anger against the West is economics. The availability of a significant number of unemployed men between the ages of fifteen and thirty became a source of instability and violence within Islam.⁷³ These large numbers of disaffected men are recruited by Islamic causes and exert tremendous pressure on neighboring societies. Most countries that trade internationally are based in the West or have American associations. Even those companies from Southeast Asia are thought to be Western in attitude and style. As the radicals have sought to identify the satanic forces whose goal is to destroy Islam, they have identified western corporate leaders as having no religious beliefs, who only see Islam as an obstacle to their materialist ambitions.⁷⁴ The radicals believe that the West will continue to use economic policies to globally dominate Islam. Radicals believe, for example, that the West exploits Muslim petroleum, their sole natural resource, and, literally, does so to fuel Western economics. In the past, the West has used economics to contain, humiliate, and defeat Islam. The radicals want to put a stop to this domination by the West and restore Islam to its rightful place.

Like all stereotypes, each of these extreme views holds a certain amount of truth. The West has dominated Islam in ways that have aroused comprehensible consensus for the Islamic radicals. The vast financial and military networks of the West have affected Islam. There has indeed been a great conflict between the secular life of the West and the religious life of the radicals as the West has occupied the Arabian Peninsula. And the West cannot offer the radicals support for their solution on how to deal with Israel—that is, to obliterate the established nation. Radicals, who feel their lives are being controlled by the infidels of the West, find the West an easy target for their hate.⁷⁵

WHAT CAN BE DONE

If the war you are talking about today had been dealt with from the beginning through reason and logic and without excitement, it would not have grown in dimension or ferocity.⁷⁶

Looking at the volatile problems of terrorism today, one wonders if solutions can be found. The truth is terrorism is not part of a generalized human problem. It is a specific and identifiable problem on its own. Perhaps it is specific and identifiable, because it can be isolated from the context that breeds it, it is a remediable problem—one that can be countered.⁷⁷

The nature of today's terrorism cannot be countered with yesterday's methods. Ultimately, defeating terrorism will require neutralizing Islamic religious radicals who are its motivating force. This war cannot be won by military power alone. Military force is no match for religious zeal. A religious and cultural strategy must supplement military efforts.⁷⁸ The West should learn from one of the best students of Islamic radicals, the Dutch scholar Prof. Johannes Jansen:

In a fiercely competitive society, the dominant religion may preach that the greatest virtue is to love one's neighbor. The religion of the group, which over the centuries has become marginalized, may, on the other hand, preach that God has exclusively and explicitly chosen those who follow his commandments. This group may come to believe that it plays a central role in the history of God and his creation. In a society where the law is not much more than an interesting but highly successful theoretical matter religion may proclaim that following God's laws is the only way to put things right...Islamic fundamentalism is both politics and religion. It has a dual nature. When it is analyzed as if it were a movement that has political nature only, mistakes are made because fundamentalism is fully religion at the same time.⁷⁹

The West has been wise to form a coalition with moderate Islamic states to deal with the problem of terrorism. Nevertheless, to have any lasting effect, the coalition needs to address the radical hatred of the West at its roots. Working together with moderate Muslims, the West needs to put forth a realistic vision of how all-Islamic peoples can be partners with the West.⁸⁰

Besides being vigilant, declaring war on the Islamic radicals, and working with moderate Muslims, the West might re-consider its own fundamental values. Is the military image of the West really true to its core? Maybe it is time for the West to be known for more than a place of freedom and democracy. Maybe it is time for the West to confidently affirm itself as a multi-faith, multi-national community, one ready to be the example the world needs.

Where does the West begin? First, the Western foreign policies must use all means at its disposal to solve the Israeli-Palestinian problem. The question of Palestine and the occupied territories has such political and psychological importance in the Islamic world that no government can pass on its responsibilities in the peace process and hope to be a key player in the Arab-Israeli dispute.⁸¹ The oppressive desperation that marks the lives of the Palestinians is a breeding ground for violence. The Islamic radicals are intent on dismantling Israel, though they can presently only harass the Israelis and the supporters of the peace process in Arab countries. The greatest damage can be done through the Palestinian Authority, which is the weakest link in the peace process.⁸² Expectations of radical moderation regarding Israel, the peace process, and the West cannot be totally dismissed. But such moderations can happen only in an environment that makes the Islamic radical platform no longer appealing.⁸³

Second, something must be done to lessen the runaway corruption and oppression that marks the political system in many of the Gulf States. One of the Islamic radical movements' greatest successes is their ability to present themselves to a large Muslim public all over the Muslim world as the bearers of true Islam, emphasizing those elements that attract the most economically deprived poor majority of the population. They appeal to the lower classes of society who are seeking messianic solutions to their hopeless situation by emphasizing human values such as social justice.⁸⁴ Bin Laden charged in his 1996 Declaration of War against America, "By opening the Arab peninsula to the crusaders, the regime disobeyed and acted against what has been enjoined by the messenger of God."⁸⁵ He was condemning Saudi leaders, but many radicals see not just the Saudi regime but also the entire political and social order in the Arab world today as tyrannical and corrupt.⁸⁶ The West must continue to acknowledge that economic justice now is demanded by the masses that make up the nations of the Middle East. There can be no peace while the affluent elite prospers at the expense of the poor majority. The West should encourage Muslim nations to modernize their economies and help them lift their masses out of poverty.

Third, the West would do well to promote the establishment of civil society and political development in the region. In an Islamic society, the people are not vested with ultimate sovereignty, nor does absolute authority rest with the head of the state. Ultimate sovereignty

and absolute authority rest in God and the only operative principle in an Islamic state are the supremacy of Islamic law.⁸⁷ The West must understand the refinements and intricacies of Islamic ideology and law and be able to differentiate between what is 'Islamic' and that which might be a figment of the observer's imagination or the product of personal religious biases.⁸⁸ The West should de-emphasize military assistance to Islamic states and tie its support to aid in areas such as housing, education, social services, and public works. When these areas are neglected, the chances are greater that radical elements will seek to take over inherently unstable governments and strengthen their opposition to the West.

Fourth, the West must respect the national autonomy and independence of the sovereign states in the Middle East. Many in the West assume that the Muslims must adopt the Western democratic method of government because there is no other appropriate substitute, which could yield better results. However, this ignores the fundamental principles on which an Islamic state functions—that it can only be an Islamic state if it strictly adheres to its belief that ultimate sovereignty is vested in God and in the supremacy of Islamic law.⁸⁹

Fifth, the leaders and peoples of the West must develop a deeper understanding of the societies and cultures of the Muslims. The West must supplement its considerable firepower with brainpower. To this end, the West must strive to achieve a better appreciation of the Islamic culture through the study of their history, their literature, their art, and their achievements. Even though the West need not adopt Islamic ways, it should be tolerant in its perception of Islam by cultivating an understanding and respect of the proper relationship Islam teaches between religion and politics. This tolerance is best achieved through education and a more enlightened media.

CONCLUSION

Fundamentalism, in any religion, asks the believer to put his intelligence on the shelf and in itself that is usually harmless enough. When it has militant overtones, however, it is self-righteous, irrational, anti-intellectual and dangerous.⁹⁰

Islamic radicals do pose a direct threat to Western interests. Their goals of ridding their region of Western influence, the total destruction of Zionism, and transforming their way of life into a simpler one based on religious ideas will be extremely difficult to reconcile with some of the basic ideals of Western democracies.⁹¹ Nevertheless, religious terrorism has always existed in one form or another and the current global wave of religious terrorism will not last forever. Yet since terrorism will continue to exist in one form or another, the problem for the West will be one of control, not elimination.

The fact that the religious and cultural outlooks of the West and Islamic radicals are very different does not have to result in a “clash of civilizations.” Democracy and secular culture are relatively recent historical phenomena and certainly not the only model for nations. The West has been able to overcome periods of bitter enmity and to establish peaceful relations with other culturally different nations or regions. Surely, Western and Islamic nations are now in a period of great tension and there will be future periods of tension. However, given the opportunity for a convergence of economic and strategic interests, in the end they can find ways to accommodate each other.⁹²

One of the Islamic radical ironies is that although religion has been used to justify violence, violence can also empower religion. Thus after years of waiting, Islamic radicals have made reappearance as an ideology of social order in a dramatic fashion through the instrument of religious terrorism. In time, the violence will end, but the issue will remain. Religion gives spirit to public life and provides a beacon for moral order. At the same time, religion needs the temper of rationality and fair play that enlightenment gives. In a curious way, the cure for religious terrorism as it relates to Islamic radicals may ultimately lie in a renewed appreciation for religion itself.⁹³

Subsequent to the events of September 11, the West must take a serious crash course on Islam. It cannot wrap itself in a cocoon. The West has global, economic, political, and security interests that requires its involvement in all of the world's activities. Information is power; as a free society, one that is constantly renewed and strengthened by integrating knowledge from all lands and cultures, greater emphasis on information sharing and understanding through education will equip the peoples of the West with the knowledge needed to confront the problem and find a solution. The West owes this to the 1.2 billion Muslims it shares this world with. Moreover, the West owes it to itself.

WORD COUNT: 6,640

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